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## HANS SACHS.

## II.

[From Gervinus's History of German Poetry: ch. vii. sec. 7.]

*Translated by Rev. C. T. Brooks.*

AN attentive observation of religious affairs in Germany of itself led Hans Sachs to consider the German empire and its condition, particularly at the time of the Smalcald War. In the fifth decade we find, therefore, the poetizing master particularly busy with that subject. He lashes what Hutten and every disinterested man of the time lashed; but he does it in his own peculiar way. He remains true to the conviction which Hutten had abandoned, that public spirit and harmony were the only salvation for Germany. The gods hold (1544) a council upon German affairs (I. 4. 401). The discord there, in spite of all their Diets, will not end. Mars is for going into it with fire and sword, Juno is for pacifying the princes with money; Plutus opposes that, on the ground that matters would only break out worse again. It is proposed to send distress and poverty upon them; but then it stands to be feared that they would oppress so much the worse. Mercury shall establish peace and concord by his oratorical gifts, but it is to be apprehended that each party will be in the right, and is deaf to all persuasion. Phœbus shall enlighten the blind, only they know the truth full well, and defile themselves with lies. Minerva counsels to send the Commonweal, the Republica, but Mercury cannot find her; in the imperial cities she is not at home, she is not to be found in heaven or earth; Luna once saw her in Athens, now she has crept away into holes and caves, and when at last she is found, lame and sick, Æsculapius must first undertake the doubtful experiment of her cure. Fancies of this kind lead the poet in manifold ways to reflection on the source of ruin in a State; not content with having declared himself respecting the want of disinterestedness in the high places of political society, he next looks round upon all conditions at once, as related to the state. Monastic orders, sects and dissensions, and the disgraceful life of the priests, loosen all bonds. Priests and jurists roast in his Dantian penal hell in the hottest fire, as Hutten also would have thought right, because the one class with their unprofitable squabbles, the other with their artifices and delays, both with opinions and glosses, confound cases and judgments, and keep themselves farthest aloof from those salvific relations to which the age, out of its unnaturally entangled situation, strives to get back. So too had Pauli, with this same insight, found that, in respect to religion, the too great number of articles of faith made a revolution necessary, although he warned men against the new prophet; Augustine had already complained, eleven hundred years before, that there were too many laws accumulated in church and state, while since his day there had been added the Decree and the Decretal, Sext, Clementine, the Extravagantes, and so many statutes, constitutions, synodalia, and usages of the choir, and there were so many

nutshells in the way that we could hardly recognize the kernel—God's commandment—among them. And so too, Hans Sachs represents a simple miller, whose son brings him home from his studies an annotated Corpus-juris, chopping off the margin with the notes. It is clear to the eyes of the Master, that the extortionate system of the princes, the robbing and fleecing practised by the nobility, the defects of the Diet, the artifices and postponements of the courts, the ambition of the citizens to imitate the splendor of the nobility, in short, that the oppression from above (II. 4. 61.) and the uneasiness and hankering from below, are the ruin of the country. Gladly would he escape his wretched conviction of the state of the world; the devil appears to him (1540) as he comes to get workmen in Nuremberg for the extension of his infernal edifice; Hans tells him, he may as well give that up, assuring him that all things have been going on of late upon the earth as well as can be; the evil one will not believe him, however, except on the oath of ten honest witnesses, and these, unhappily, he cannot produce. He represents (I. 3. 294.) Peace as wandering through all the provinces of the empire, and trying it with every class of people. She goes to the princes, and finds bloodthirstiness and tyranny; to the clergy, and finds heresy and murder; among the burghers she lights on contests with the nobility; among the merchants, upon discontent and fraud; among the mechanics, upon envy and conspiracy; among the peasants, upon treachery, bitterness, and persecution; in married life, upon discord; in neighborhoods, upon backbiting and slander; among women, upon gossip; among men, upon coarseness. In his Wolf's Complaint, written in 1543 (a well-known favorite old theme), he represents (I. 3. 347.) the animal as bewailing with fluent speech, that the very beast lives up to his nature;\* and that one day the cattle would bear testimony against all men, how these alone had lived against nature, reason and virtue. That the selfishness prevalent in all classes was the source of all prevailing evils, is a conviction which he expresses in manifold ways in the poems of the fourth and fifth decade, where the glow of moral conflict in him is at its highest; where, in all conceivable forms, with seriousness and severity, with sadness and mockery, with unwearied solicitude he sets before the eyes of the people his doctrine, that envy is the cause of all discord, that baiting and barking fan the fire, that all love and fidelity have disappeared and been crowded out, the truth is forced to flee, modesty and chastity are exiled, the four cardinal virtues imprisoned, courage and magnanimity gone, and that nothing but public spirit can help matters. In this mood he came upon the times when the Reformers and Humanists had already opened antiquity, when the historical and philosophical writings of the Greeks and Romans were translated and received with eagerness; when Plutarch, Seneca, and Cicero were read with such inspiration. With his usual diligence, Hans Sachs took out of a great mass of authors, collecting and working over, whatever suited

\* "Let dogs delight."—(Translator.)

his purpose; and how must he have been astonished to find in the history of the old nations that very public spirit so prominent, which among the German nations he so sorely missed; how surprised, to read in those innumerable anecdotes, that the old philosophers practised more than taught the subjugation of nature and the bridling of human inborn lusts and impulses (II. 48. 5.); whereas, the hypocritical preachers of religion in his day made fine words and practised disgraceful actions. How must he have started with amazement, at finding among the heathen those great examples of love, friendship, patriotism, to which his Christian intercourse presented him so many contrasts of hatred, envy, selfishness. So had every translator of ancient works defended the virtue and precepts of the ancients; so had Hartlieb, in his *Alexander*, pointed to the pious divine-service of the Greeks, as something from which the Christians could take an example; so had Peter Tritonius wished people would imitate the ancients, rather than curse them so intolerantly. With evident delight Hans Sachs now applied himself to everything of the writings of the ancients that he could lay his hands on, and in a series of years communicated an innumerable variety of translations and poems, of which he borrowed the materials from Diodorus (translated by Herold, 1554), from Herodotus, Herodian, Plutarch, Justin, Xenophon (all translated in whole or part by Boner, between 1532 and 1540,) from Livy (by Schöferlein, 1505), from Pliny (translated in 1565), from Ovid, Virgil, Lucian, Homer, Apuleius, Musæus, Val. Maximus, Seneca, Cicero, and others. More inclined to original production and re-modelling, he only took the hint and the start from single expressions of the old philosophers, or from passages of their life, and then gave them a dress of his own, and wove in his own observations. A great multitude of his panegyrics, his allegoric delineations, his argumentative battles, which predominate in this decade, and are the finest fruit, withal, that his creative muse, then in the freshest activity, produced, are nothing but such developments of some thought suggested by Socrates, Cicero, or Seneca.

The most of those allegorical and other poetic compositions, which persecute with the lash of satire the excesses of the times still more than vice itself—whereas, at a later day, he more mildly and tolerantly only laughs at them—are from this vigorous period, when, too, he took more interest in public life. The happy and safe observation of the world and men, which was natural to the genius of our Meister, found, in the attention of the ancient philosophers of the people to the inner nature of man, rich nourishment; and in their thoughtful moderation he found confirmation for the tranquillity with which he looks unconfused on the swarming ant-hill of mankind (I. 3. 344.) and sets the people before the mirror of his faithful pictures; their contemplative wisdom helped on his plastic sense. Meanwhile, he never forgot the Testaments, and made his poetic muse, as the Reformers did their muse of science, go always hand-in-hand with the primitive Christian doctrine.

And therefore one and the same sentiment speaks out of those example-picturings from the Bible touching pleasure, neglect of education and the like (1540), and out of all those dialogues (from thirty years, wherein he often grafts his own history upon his readings of the ancients) out of the allegorical pictures of Care, of human Plans, Fortune, Rumor, transitory worldly Pleasure, Poverty, Age and Youth, of Solon's Consolation, and many similar things. He drew forth for his contemporaries, from the history of antiquity, just what we present in school to the child's mind, and in the directest way led the purest water of the newly-discovered fountain down to the very lowest classes of the people. What two or three hundred years had already been laboring for, would, therefore, have been as good as lost, had not, at this period of the first printing, and when the people were really plastic and read, a man, who hit the true tone of the people, renewed in new phrase, in an apt presentation, the whole mass of what Thomasin, the *Runner*,\* and all didactic poems and collections of Examples had long since spread abroad. This merit we must never forget to ascribe to Hans Sachs. He was a humanistic teacher of the people, as the philosophers were of youth. He first popularly introduced the ancients among us on their purely moral side, as in later times, on the cosmopolitan and life-philosophy side, Wieland introduced his Cicero, Lucian, and Horace.

From the 6th decade a different taste begins to be somewhat more prominent in Hans Sachs's poetry. He gives himself more to pranks and carnival farces, the didactic loves to link itself to examples, the ethic character of his poems grows more plastic, his German painting more a Flemish, his allegory alternates oftener with fable, direct references to the present grow more rare, he leads us from public into private life. He sees, then, conditions and classes less in their relation to the state and to duty, than to human nature and reason in general; he portrays more the queer behavior of men in humorous colors, and laughs at it, instead of lashing it as he had formerly done. His impressively strict teaching fades more and more before the grotesque delineation; his castigatory preaching becomes ironical representation; his poesy, which before had rather enforced virtues, aims now more to assuage sadness; the severity of the man wears off and yields to the mildness of the old man. At every period of his life the master has made jests and stories; but after his fiftieth year both oftener and better than ever. The whole uniformity of his manner, and the manufactured style of his poetry, are represented in this department; but it is, at the same time, his highest triumph. He derived this description of serious and comic didactic poetry from the older times; the novels, diverting tales, and farces whereof he revived in vast numbers, and added new ones; but he also left it behind him to after times. No earlier story-teller matches him in moral pith, few later ones in the art of representation and

\* By Hugo von Trimberg: finished in 1300, and first published under that title in Frankfort on the Mayn, in 1549.—*Carlyle*.

genuine humor. He studied with the best masters of narrative; was one of Boccaccio's earliest pupils; to the masters of poetry, to a Goethe, he has been a most direct teacher; his comic legends for naive, innocent expositions and sound feeling, may serve as models. His delineations of the world turned upside down, or of the Fool's Paradise, where he has all the world for rivals, will, in spite of Boccaccio and the French comic fiction of Cockaigne, always assert their worth. His quizzings of the tip-staffs, the heaven-stormers, whom neither St. Peter can bear in paradise, nor Lucifer in hell, are quite incomparable. And as regards his carnival sport, there are not many who could have known how to make such a deep and penetrating use of drollery; and Goethe found the species worth imitating, and Hans Sachs's worth working out in a manner, which, whether one is meditating a whimsical, gross, marionette-like representation or good improvisation, are certainly capable of the highest effect. The life and truth of the picturing, the manifold crowd of objects, and the always equal sureness and sharpness of his pencil, is in these pieces uncommonly charming, and has attracted even our Goethe, who, in his "Hans Sachs's Poetic Mission," has erected to the old master the most honorable monument. The figures live and move here before us, and if Hans Sachs extols the painter; as one who can set everything before our eyes, so that it could not be related more clearly, so does he himself both narrate and paint in such a manner that it could not be placed before our eyes more clearly. The most fresh and genial humor colors the images of the magic casket which he opens for us, when he leads us to carnivals and church-fairs, to heaven and hell, to the mounts of deception and drunkenness, into the lands of laziness and madness, where he makes us intimate with the coarse gallantry of the fellows, and the saucy coyness of the girls; when at the beer-frollic he exhibits to us a model of vulgarity, bestial existence, and "ox-like guzzling," when he overhears at evening the conversation of people in their houses, when he watches at the market the doings of the barbers and mountebanks, when he gives a counterfeit presentment of the awkward intricacies of the peasants' dances, all which is to be compared with nothing but the burlesques of the Flemish painting. We accompany the poet into the midst of his tip-staffs, boors, mechanics, troopers, gypsies, priests, and scholars, observe their crazy doings; we hear the guide and master preaching in the midst of all moderation and morality, see the mild and life-enjoying monitor wink at their roguish pranks, and where the crowd cross and hit each other, reconcile them with encouragement and indulgence. Now he cudgels a skin-flint, but with moderation, without extravagance, and good-hearted instruction excuses it; now he assails with exaggeration courtship and bad house-management; but one sees through the blunt joke of a more rough than immoral sort of man. Formerly, more occupied with himself, with empire and church, in intercourse with muses, guardian spirits, gods, angels, and devils, we saw him roaming through

heaven and hell, conversing with invisible ones, in earnest, bent on great thoughts; now he has plunged into the midst of the heaving multitude, seeks entertainment and exhilaration; mixes with the lowest classes in taverns, woods, and markets. Formerly his favorite drolleries (of the carnival, of the fool's feast, the fool's bath, the fool's paradise, Change-quick, John Lazy, Anti-rosemary, of Lie-Mountain and Mount Guzzle, of the Sluggard, etc., from 1530-40) had been allegorical; now he leads us in the most actual world, into the filthiest situations, into the lowest doings. His poesy takes, therefore, the same course that popular song did, which we saw, in like manner, at this time, sink from a fairer eminence. Yet, here also, there is always measure in his representation, measure in his teaching. He loves to have to do with a rude nobility, with corrupt cities, with covetous and aspiring peasants. He thinks things were quite right in the world, when the peasants were yet simple, pious and plain, and not as now, sly and tricky. When he ridicules and derides sottish stupidity and hardheartedness, you see in the back-ground the good country squire, Strepsiadès, behind whose simplicity the comic poet hides his direct judgment. Laughingly and forbearingly he tells the truth, and teaches goodness, he bathes, and at most cuts,\* the fools, when he meditates rooting out, now loose management of children, now coarse boorishness, evil courses coupled with a better discernment, miserliness and prodigality, quarrelsomeness, envy, calumny, impudence, self-conceit, laziness and gluttony, gambling and connubial infidelity. All that clearly marks the good German middle estate, the artisan-character, the respectable guild-nature, homely sense, honesty and fairness, pious simplicity, sound moral grit, and practical insight into life, speaks amiably in every tone and every sentiment of these pieces, devoid as many of them are, of intrinsic virtue and shallow in their wit.

In the last decades of Hans Sachs's poetic compositions a significant change appears. He himself complains repeatedly of the decline of Art in general. Time was when it had flourished; every corner full of learned men, sensible artisans and artists enough, and books in plenty; now the Arts were common and despised, few disciples were left, and they were eyed askance as Fantasts; the world runs after pleasure and pelf, the muses have left the country. His moral song had drawn upon him envy and hatred; in many ways the thought came to him to leave off singing, even because at last his reason told him that his poetic power was failing. Still, however, he determines confidently to keep his capital at interest; after forty-four years of devotion to the muses, he will not even now cease to propagate virtue and to mitigate sorrow, and no vilifying tongue shall disturb him in his holy calling. At the edition of his works, which he lived to see, he labored, par-

\* "His best piece known to us is the *Fastnacht Spiel* (Shrove-tide farce) of the *Narrenschneiden*, where the doctor cures a bloated and lethargic patient by cutting out half a dozen fools from his interior."—*Carlyle*.

ticularly in the years 1557-59, in a remarkably active manner, and only when we see here from his own statements what a vast number of things in all he had up to that time composed (788 longer pieces and 4,270 Bars\* of German meister-songs, not meant for the press, "but to help adorn and sustain the singing-school"), do we comprehend how, in these years, out of an incredible reading, he could elaborate the materials for such a monstrous multitude of poems. But then in these three years he wrote towards a hundred narratives from ancient, mediæval, northern and German history, besides a great number of drolleries, and pieces of the Eulenspiegel class, and all other possible varieties, articles of natural history, spiritual and secular tragedies and comedies, anecdotes, sayings of philosophers, dialogues and observations of all sorts, gospels, fables, psalms, prophecies, and Testament teachings. Growing ever poorer in invention, he seizes now upon every form and every subject. One is struck, however, at finding again in his writing those figures, those applications of incidents from the Old Testament to new circumstances. He has treated all the poetic forms there have been for several centuries; has abstracted all the more significant works. He has didactic pieces like Hugo von Trimberg, allegories like Müglin, meister-songs, fables, specimens of every kind, political poems, dialogues after Lucian, pæugetics like Rosenblut's, moral sermons, buffoon poetry, and church-songs; to all this he adds now, preëminently, in his last years, the drama. He had already tried it in his earliest years, particularly to work over the dialogue form of Lucian and other similar matter, in the style of Rosenblut and Hans Folz; but now he seized upon the classic form, after the model of Terence and Reuchlin, and elaborated more and more a regular drama. The art of sketching a dramatic plan, and laying out a dialogue, is found with him only in its childhood. Yet there lay in him all the germs for a popular drama, which would have developed itself among us, but for the intrusion of other elements, exactly like the English drama, to the style of which Jacob Ayrrer still more distinctly pointed, who may be looked upon as a mere follower † of Hans Sachs.

We shall, in noticing this man, whose only side is the Drama, whereas in Hans Sachs it forms by far the most unsatisfactory and least important, take a nearer view of the manner of these pieces, which have with him far more pretension, and, on the whole, much less worth, not so great brevity, but much more emptiness, a similar stiffness of movement and want of color in the representation, but more mechanical outlay than those of Hans Sachs. The subjects divide themselves, with both alike, into carnival plays and serious histories, as they also called the dramas in England; only Hans Sachs has, besides, the religious pieces out of the Old and New Testaments, which, since the middle of the 16th century, had found a new reception in

Germany. The historical pieces, again, are partly actual historic subjects, such as found their completion in Shakspeare's national pieces, or they are dramatized novels from the same sources whence Shakspeare drew similar ones, or they are (as was also done by Ayrrer, Wild, and others) borrowed from romances and books of the people. This we regard as quite a peculiar sign of the times. The present ceased to offer materials for poetry; popular poetry, occasional poetry, came to a stand; people were tired, too, of the common tone, they receded from the actual, and sought another and nobler element for the poetic art. Before ancient art, or its fac-similes in Spain and Italy, found reception, men pointed back once more to the old romantic and reproduced it in old and new forms—a foolish idea. One might now, like Puschmann, prosaically collect the rules of old Art; but it was no more to be caught: the book of heroes theorized about giants and dwarfs, heroes and men; Paracelsus cast with cabalistic representations an ingenious theory of elementary spirits drawn from the popular belief and from poetry; but that the ghost-stories of the negress, which John Adolphus edited, or of the Staufenberg, which Fischart remodelled, or of the Thedel Unverferden of Thym, should have again any influence upon poetry, was not to be expected. So also were the Book of Love, which has already been alluded to, and then these dramatic treatments of the same romantic subjects by Ayrrer and Hans Sachs, greater, weightier efforts, which aimed at a renaturalizing of these old chivalric poems, and of the taste for them. But for this there was no longer any ground left in Germany. The coarser popular taste continued still in Dedekind, Fischart, and others, to wage war against all affectation of a "third-heaven-enraptured" style. There was already too great activity in the Romanish nations, trade was too open, the passion for newness too common, not to make men seek rather the new abroad than the old at home; and then, too, classic instruction had already taken quietly too great a hold to make it possible not to look soon for the first attempts to naturalize ancient classic forms and materials. Still, however, it remains memorable enough that Hans Sachs, as he, in his style of poetry always aimed to clear himself from the common and degraded manner of his contemporaries, so also, at last, in his subjects, strove after something nobler, although he, in his thoroughly ignoble way of handling these heroic materials, betrayed how little suited the times any longer were for a restoration of these things to favor.

A HABIT of observation and of conscious enjoyment in Art has important effects on the student's mind. . . . It develops insight into evidences of character, gives him new and matter-of-fact standards by which to judge of healthiness in form, and even healthiness in mind. It increases the perception of nature, and enlarges for him the language of expression;—that unspoken tongue in which man holds so much intercourse with his kind.—*National Magazine*. (Eng.)

\* Bar was the technical name the companies of meisters gave to the songs composed by their members for their meetings.

† Literally "after-runner" (a word corresponding to fore-runner).